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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

COMMENT

MOVING

POETS and prosers have discussed in many volumes man's relation to his environment, but how much we are what surrounds us is still an open question.

For nearly ten years POETRY has been at home in the not-over-spacious room to the left of the entrance of 543 Cass Street. By the time this number is issued we shall have torn ourselves away from this cubic box of memories; we shall have shifted our furniture and files, our books and back numbers, our gallery of poets' photographs and other pictures, our tempers and temperaments, our hearts and hopes and hospitalities, to a strange place as yet unenriched by history, leaving this atmospheric chamber, doubled in the big Victorian mirror over the mantel-piece, to the coldly calculating advances of the medical department of an insurance company.

But we cannot depart without saying goodbye, without consecrating our farewell by recalling the things which have happened, the people who have entered or lingered, in this old haunted and haunting room. Once it was part of a dwelling which, erected soon after the Great Fire of Seventy-one, housed the family and the books of Ezra McCagg, owner of the largest private library in Chicago. For two or three decades the house stood among congenial neighbors—abodes of the quality, set in spacious grounds. But the quality, including the McCaggs, scattered, and

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business penetrated—at first on tip-toe, hesitatingly. The American Bankers' Insurance Company bought the place and connected it in the rear with a new building, the two right-angling an apartment-house on the corner. And while their alterations were still fresh, in the summer of 1912, the inexperienced prospective editor of a poets' magazine-to-be, entered the Ohio Street door one morning in search of a North Side office in the neighborhood.

Whom should she find in possession, as president of the insurance company, but one of the magazine's guarantors—Mr. James P. Whedon of happy memory, one of the most generous of all because his fortune was always moderate. Soon the editor and her first associate, Alice Corbin Henderson, were hospitably installed in one of the two rentable rooms beside the Cass Street entrance, their good friend adding office-desks and chairs to their meagre business equipment. From this room, during that summer of 1912, the first letters and circulars went out in search of contributors and subscribers, and hither came those first responses on which depended the vitality of the magazine.

Ezra Pound's first letter, for example—I have often recorded the cordiality of his co-operation as POETRY's first representative abroad. Along with him came through the mail the other first imagists—H. D. and Aldington, W. C. Williams and Flint and Cannéll. John G. Neihardt greeted us with a tragedy; Joseph Campbell with *The Piper*; Allen Upward with his *Scented Leaves from a*

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Chinese Jar; Joyce Kilmer—long before the brutal War which killed him—with *Trees*; John Reed—heroic beloved vagabond—with *Sangar*; Mrs. Conkling with her musical-minded *Symphony in a Mexican Garden*, which, arriving in the nick of time for our first number, aided us in antedating a proposed Boston contemporary who had threatened to requisition our title. And so on—those important early contributors who enriched the magazine with their own values.

The excitement of the adventure is what I remember best from that first experimental year. The novel enterprise hovered, in the mind of the public, on the delicate border-line between the sublime and the ridiculous; and our own minds trembled between a thrill and a laugh. If pride was inflated by authoritative words from poets and critics, it soon collapsed under expert stabs of wrath or ridicule. If a few new and unknown poets aroused our hopes of genius, hundreds astounded us with self-satisfied mediocrity or worse. We were dashed between extremes, like a rubber ball in the play of a juggler; and the thing least expected was what happened next.

Who led the long procession of distinguished visitors whose faces and words now haunt these walls? I think Rabindranath Tagore was the first of the then-unknown-but-now-famous bards who have actually darkened the Cass Street door and sat in our "poets' chair." Tagore, the sage of Bengal, whom we had thought of as in England or maybe India, but who wrote to us from Urbana,

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Illinois, upon his first appearance in English in POETRY's third number—December, 1912. And the second was Lindsay, who followed his *General Booth* to Cass Street that first winter, sealing his bardship with the hand of friendship. Witter Bynner and Arthur Ficke, the Damon and Pythias of the art, were among the early arrivals; and Agnes Lee Freer, a newly married resident of Chicago; and Helen Hoyt, who soon graduated from her commercial post into POETRY's office; and Maxwell Bodenheim, then mute and inglorious.

And so on. The magic transformation of abstract name-carrying entities into living, breathing men and women, was then, as it continues to be, the editor's high reward. Poets, it became evident, were not mere voices far away, but human beings who could come into Cass Street and even develop into friends. During our second twelvemonth there were important miracles in this kind. Amy Lowell, pilgrimaging from Boston to Chicago with poems under her arm, seemed a prophet of change—was East coming West at last? was an era passing, and a new one on the way? As if to give answer, here came Carl Sandburg walking solidly into the office when the fateful year 1914 was new or perhaps unborn; entering with his strong hand out and his slow rich loyal voice uttering words of greeting.

In the spring arrived two British poets from opposite curves of the world. The illustrious William Butler Yeats changed from a Poet Enshrined into a living

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Irishman who could give tit for tat to George Moore's imaginative gossip about him which had just appeared. In his honor POETRY "eased out" of Cass Street long enough to give a banquet which has since been recognized as a milestone in the path of the "new movement." And along in April or May, one afternoon when the editor was alone, entered, on his way home from the South Seas, a handsome young Englishman then still obscure — one Rupert Brooke, a member of the "Georgian" group whose first anthology had but recently appeared. How peaceful was the day—how remote the possibility of war—to this blond young poet whose spirit was to "straighten like a flame" at the then-so-imminent bugle call, and run into the war-god's deadly arms with a song!

Sara Teasdale, John Gould Fletcher, Edgar Lee Masters—these and many others, from Missouri, Arkansas, Chicago, the Seven Seas, were Cass Street guests of those early years. Later came Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens—opposite poles of the *renaissance*. The procession goes on still—may it find its way into Erie Street—the procession of shadow-shapes assuming flesh and blood.

Nor should we forget the others—the countless visitors who have arrived at our doors but never in our covers. They come with verses, mostly by mail but often in person; some modestly, some over-sure. They ask for criticism which, if granted, rarely satisfies the urge or ache within. They can not be classified—they are as varied as other growths of the living earth. Rich and poor, bourgeois

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and bolshevik, refined and coarse, tragic and absurd—they have played their different parts in Cass Street, strangely unlike but moved always by the same motive: the longing to express themselves, to reveal their naked souls.

If these walls could speak—these walls that we are leaving! They have heard everything discussed and torn to bits—men, women, poems, theories, tendencies, the war, the peace, marriage, divorce, clothes, coiffures, eye-brows, the abstract beauty and the ultimate defeat, life, death and immortality, the weather and the curve of a dog's tail. And they have listened through hours of silence, with nothing ringing but the telephone, while the editor wrote, in old-fashioned long-hand, countless breathlessly-brief notes to poets; or summoned spirits from the vasty deep to infuse wit and wisdom into her editorials, and help her come to the end with a flourish—as now, when she must test POETRY's personality by shifting its environment, as she signs a final farewell to old Five-forty-three.

H. M.

REVIEWS

A WOMAN WITH A HAMMER

The Contemplative Quarry and The Man with a Hammer, by Anna Wickham. Introduction by Louis Untermeyer. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

"The most casual reading—if such a thing were possible—of Mrs. Wickham's work reveals the strength of